


SOME

THOUGHTS

ABOUT

TRADE.

HIS Majesty having in His most Gracious Speech to both Houses in Parliament recommended to them the Care of Trade, and favour'd it Himself with His Proposal of a Bill, *For the more effectual Preventing and Punishing Unlawful and Clandestine Trading, which does not onely tend to defraud the Publick, but prejudice the Fair Merchant*; it will be deem'd, I hope, a pardonable Presumption in me, to offer a few Words towards attaining that great and happy end. And I am perswaded, that since His Majesty in this Royal Care, has continued to evince Himself truly a Father of His People, it must endear Him to them, and cannot reasonably fail of commanding the Title of *Deliciæ humani generis*, as he much more deserves it, than even that great Roman Emperor it was first Ascrib'd to. Nor is it to be imagin'd, That this Consideration can miss of disposing that August Assembly to a solid, and unbiass'd Poisure of all Proposals to that purpose laid before them. Mine may be the most inconsiderable, but as none can be offer'd with greater Sincerity, or well-meaning, so perhaps they may furnish wiser Heads with somewhat to work upon.

 There are a sort of Gentlemen who understand not much of Trade, and mind little beside their Pleasure; that exclaim against it, and take great pains to show to the World they care not how it is loaded: But to
A leave

leave them safe in their humour, since it is not perhaps the only Instance of their Indiscretion, I will advance these Propositions as things so plain, that they themselves cannot be so hardy to deny.

1st. That Trade is the Foundation of the English Happiness, and the very Basis of the Government.

2dly, That to make it thoroughly beneficial, it ought to be made

1st. Easy.

2dly, Extensive.

If these Propositions be true, as undoubtedly they are; the Truth of the first being never called in Question since we knew what Trade was in England, and the last to be made out in the following Lines, I think that man can be said to have little of the Soul of an English-man, or worthy any Countenance of the Government or People, who makes slight of this National Concern; and it is not to be doubted but those Illustrious Trustees of the People, as they have begun, will go on to show these mistaken Gentlemen, that the Safety of that is of the first Importance to the Publick Safety.

It were to be wisht it could be made easier in its Duties, that we might be able to under-sell all our Rival Neighbours, than which nothing could be more Honourable or Advantageous. By clogging our Trade we certainly lay more than what we have long seem'd to apprehend, a general Excise upon our selves; and if we seem to be insensible of it, perhaps it is because the Generality of our Gentry keeping no Accounts, they flatter themselves they are in the right; when upon a nice Scrutiny, it would be found they pay three for two: But if this is not to be obtained, yet that Trade ought to be made easier in Dispatch, and freed from Incumbrances that way, is as undoubtedly true as it is practicable. —

If Business be interrupted or obstructed in the beginning, our English Proverb says, *It can never conclude well*. Common Experience tells us, That Fountains of a foul Head rarely, if ever, produce a clear Stream; and therefore I hold my self oblig'd, to recommend first of all an Examination into the Abuses of the Custom-House. Foreigners as well as we, have and do daily complain of the Difficulties that attend the Dispatch of Business there: And it must be own'd, that tho' no Custom-House in Europe is so well adapted, and tho' we want not Laws that threaten Punishment to Offenders; yet there is no Country of Trade, that does not exceed us in quick Dispatch, or honest Execution.

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The Cause of these Evils I take to be want of Integrity, and want of Power. The first in most of the Officers belonging to that Place, and the last in that Honourable Board; who *formerly* on Application, have told the Injur'd Merchant, That they sate not there to hear Causes, but to see the King's Customs maintain'd: Not to save the Merchant from the Encroachments of the Patent Officer, or others; but to preserve the Officers in their Encroachment, and encourage them in the Continuance thereof. Now, if this be true, that the Merchant must either be liable to the Exactions of their Officers, or be referr'd to the Law; I think it may easily be determin'd which is most reasonable for him to chuse, tho' certainly it is no great Encouragement to Trade. There is scarce any one particular Fee ordered by the Book of Rates, that is not advanc'd by the Patent and other Officers a Third Part: And yet it is so small in every Man's Particular, and they have in their Power such ways of venting their Displeasure, for want of a higher Power to controul them, that few Men dare stand the Test, or when they have so, have found Relief answerable. Our wise Fore-fathers provided against these Encroachments (to which Mankind is indeed but too much addicted) by severe Laws and wise Precautions: No Man then was allow'd his Place for Life, good Behaviour only had its just Reward, and under the King's Patent, Men sate not to insult the best of the King's Subjects. He that consults the following Statutes, 5 & 6 Ed. 6. 16. 1 H. 4. 13. 4 H. 4. 20. 13 H. 4. 5. 1 H. 4. 13. 17. R. 2. 5. 14. R. 2. 10. 4. H. 4. 24. 31. H. 6. 5. 31. H. 6. 5. 14. R. 2. 20. 17. R. 2. 5. will find how careful they were to encourage the Merchant, and keep him from the Encroachments of the King's Officers. Misdemeanour by Mismanagement was then punish'd with loss of Office; and nothing less can eradicate this Evil, so scandalous to the Nation and Government. It's true, a late Parliament provided in some measure against it, but by not thus necessarily enforcing it, Mens Avarice rendred it ineffectual: For while the Book was warm with their Lips, they persisted in their old ways at the hazard of an Indictment of Perjury. But I hope for a Review, and therefore their Abuses being too numerous, and consequently not consistent with the Brevity of a Paper of this Nature, I shall leave them till that Honourable Assembly shall call for them; when, I hope, by enforcing the Penalties to an utter Incapacity of serving in any Place of the Government, and by making the Commissioners (as they were certainly intended) Overseers of their Under-Officers, and such as

are to take Care, that Right may be done to the Merchant, at the same time they take Care that Justice be done to the King in the Payment of His Duries, this great Evil may have a Remedy to the Honour of the Nation, as well as Quiet of the Merchant.

I wish it were not more difficult to make Trade extensive, than it is to make it easie : But I am sensible I shall have a large, tho' not very considerable Party to cope against in my Proposal of Extension, notwithstanding I believe the other will be assented to by all. Tho' I am satisfied confining the Trade to a few, is an Error of the first Concoction, yet I am as well satisfied, confining it to its just Number will be as beneficial. I mean, not by a just Number, any set Number of Persons : But my meaning is, That those onely, who have been, or shall be bred up as Merchants, shall follow it, and that all other Tradesmen shall be confin'd to their particular Callings, as they were educated. If I mistake not, we are not without Laws to this good Purpose ; but like other good Laws, their Antiquity makes them exploded. But however, I doubt not to make it evident, that it is the Interest of the Nation so to confine Trade, and that such a Confinement is the most probable way to make it more extensive. This may be thought a Paradox ; but if People lay aside their Prejudices, I doubt not but it will be found a true one.

I know it is a Maxim, and in a great measure a true one ; that it is for the Interest of the Nation to have all Goods sold cheap at our own Market. Tho' whether it consists with the Interest of the Nation, to encourage the Consumption of any Foreign Commodities by such a Cheapness, will bear a Question : Or, in Strictness of Argument, it will not bear a Question ; it being undeniably true, that the less we consume of Foreign Commodities, the richer we are. But granting it to be true, that it is agreeable to the Interest of the Nation, that all Goods be sold cheap at our own Market ; it is true with equal Reason, that it is as much against the Interest of the Nation that all its own Manufactures and Exportations of Foreign Goods should be sold over cheap, and often with a Loss at Foreign Markets. It will be obvious to a common Understanding, that here the Loss is double ; and how any Merchant can long subsist under such Circumstances, to me is a Riddle. Small Profits they may set down with, if their Stocks be considerable : But Loss upon Loss will certainly eat through his Principal. That this is the Consequence of every Tradesman's running from his proper Business, will appear to any Man that half considers

considers the Matter ; and it is as evident, that the Consequence of that will be the Loss of, and in time an utter Ruine to Trade. If a Calculation were to be made of Families that have been ruin'd by not applying themselves to the Business they were bred in, but running into Trades they never understood, I doubt not it would close the Argument. Now the Ruine of Families is the Ruine of Trade ; for a Country can onely be said to be rich or poor, as the Inhabitants are either : Nor does one Man, commonly speaking, fall alone, but many with him ; and therefore the Loss of a considerable Merchant falls not on particular Persons, but on the Publick.

Nor is that true, which is common in many Peoples Mouths, that such a Restraint of Trade would be very detrimental to the Publick Revenues : For tho' it is literally true, that the larger the Importations are, the larger are the Customs, those encreasing by the Increase of Traders ; yet in the Case in hand, it is an Error rais'd by such as understand not the Nature of Trade, so well as their imaginary Interests. For should we grant that these Under-jobbers do increase the Customs by their Importations ; yet it must be granted again, that by their clogging the Market, and forcing the Fair Merchant to seek a Market in Foreign Countries ; the Inconvenience much surmounts the Advantage. For while these Under-jobbers are forc'd to sell at our own Market, for want of present Money, at what Rates they can get, and at a very great Loss ; and the Fair Merchant to avoid this Loss, is forc'd to take Refuge at a Foreign Market, where he gets nothing : It is plain, the King loses the Duty drawn back, the Fair Merchant the Interest of his Money, the Under jobber almost his Principal, and the Nation in all. Besides, by these Under-jobbers the Fair Merchant, whose Dependance is wholly upon his Trade, as all Mens ought to be on what they were educated under, is by the means afore hinted at, often ruin'd ; or at best, discourag'd so much, that he chuses to lay by his Stock ; and consequently the Revenue loses as much by this one Man's prudential Precaution, as it gets by a Hundred of these small Adventurers imprudent ventring at all.

If it be duely weigh'd in all its Circumstances, this cannot be thought the least of the Evils attending Trade, and which discouraging the Fair Merchant, requires Redress as much as any : For what Wrong can any pretend, from his being confin'd to his particular Calling ? Certainly it cannot be thought to be at all unreasonable, that he that runs the Danger ought to reap the Profit. I

am sure as many make use of Trade, it is only preserving them from being in a Politick Sense, *Felos de se*. But on the other hand, their interfering in the Fair Merchant's Business, is in a manner, an Invasion of his Right and Property.

✧ If a Tradesman be allow'd to turn Merchant on one side only, and to order his own Wares, either Linens, Druggs, or Wines, to be shippt for him, and the Value to be drawn in Bills of Exchange on him, I would fain know.

1st. What Encouragement has the Fair Merchant, who exports the Manufacture of the Nation: And

2^{dly}. Whether the Under-jobbing Merchant ought to be encouraged, for not exporting any of the Manufactures of the Nation:

✧ For 'tis as plain as any Proposition in *Euclid*, that what is imported into the Nation, not being the Product of our Exportations, is a Disadvantage to the Nation, and the greatest Discouragement to Trade. And if every Tradesman may have Liberty to order his own Goods, what shall the Fair Merchant, who by exporting our own Manufactures gives a double Advantage to the Nation, and therefore deserves the utmost Encouragement, what shall he, I say, make his Returns in? Or, where shall he find a Marke? Besides, it is in a great measure to such mean-spirited Souls as these, that we owe that Grievance complain'd of by His Majesty in His most Gracious Speech to both Houses, the running of Goods: For tho' some Mens Avarice (the Root of all bad Principles) may have led them to have done things unworthy the Name of a Merchant, and which deserv'd the greatest Contumely and Shame; yet it is here that Vice has spread, and what others have shamefully attain'd to by Bribes, these by an inborn Audacity and a natural Familiarity with those of their own low Quality, have promoted the Trade very considerably.

Undoubtedly, as this Vice ought to be timely provided against, so one great and likely way to do so, would be to provide against the Trading of all, who have other Callings, under which they were bred, and therefore ought to get their Livelihoods by. I am sure, that low Ebb that Trade is run to (especially in the *Plantations*) calls for the speediest Care, unless we are willing to lose at a Lump those Advantages we have been Years attaining to.

Clandestine Trade (in this severest Acceptation) (for 'tis as I have shew'd, clandestine in the other) is of a dangerous Consequence to Trade in general. Those that have us'd it, were never valu'd

valu'd by Persons of Integrity. And tho' one in an Age may have been said to have got an Estate under it, the Number that found it unthriving is so much greater, that if a Man had the Gift of Consideration, that of it self were enough to put it out of Countenance : But hope of Success and Expectation of Gain, will not allow those frailest of Men to be wise ; and therefore it is to be hoped, the Parliament will provide against it by severe Penalties this Session. For by means of this Knavish Practice, the Fair Merchant is not able to sell with these Vermine ; who by having their Creatures at private Ports, and running their Goods in private Creeks, save the King's Duty (as they phrase it) and may consequently under-sell the Fair Merchant very considerably. In my Opinion, there is not a Punishment great enough for such Wretches. The *Romans* made a Crime against the State, Death ; and a Man that acted against the Interest of his Country, was punish'd with the greatest Ignominy. The Present King of *Persia's* Father detecting a Baker and a Flesh-Roaster in the Publick Market, of Fraud, ordered the one to be roasted, and the other to be baked, publickly. If they for cheating a private Person (as he to them appear'd) suffered such Ignominy as well as Pain ; what is due to them who cheat their Country ? We are in a Christian Nation 'tis true, where such Barbarities will, I hope, never have Place : But the *Tallio* of the *Romans* was a very good Law. Nor is it altogether impracticable with us ; for I find in an Act of 14 Car. 2. That any Person found guilty of transporting Hides to any other Places than as provided in that Act, was by the same disabl'd for the future, to Trade in that Commodity, and severely fined. If the Act were a little extended here, and the Person found guilty, condemn'd never to use any Trade but a Handy-craft, it would be somewhat conformable to the *Lex Talionis*, and not in any great matter, differ from the Act of King *Charles*.

But perhaps it would not be amiss to confiscate his Estate, one half to the King, and one half to the Discoverer, be he who he will ; and by all means, to enforce the Justice of Peace to issue out his Warrant for a speedy Seizure. We see in the Act *against the Exportation of Wooll*, what Encouragement is given : Greater should be given here, because the Duties being great, the running Gentlemen can be more liberal in their Bribes and Gratuities. Nor should the Punishment of an Officer that is conniving or abetting, be less than in former Cases, an utter Deprivation of all the Offices he at that present does enjoy, and a total Incapacity for the Enjoyment of any other for the future.

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I cannot see that any material Objection can be made against any thing I have said. I have made it plain, I think, that Trade ought to be made easy: And that to make it so, the Merchant ought to meet with no Incumbrances at the Fountain Head. I think I have made out too, the Nature of the Extension of the Trade that is consistent with the Interest of the Nation; and that it does not depend so much upon the Multitude, as the Ability of Merchants: For tho' the first may bring Plenty, and make things cheap, it is such a Cheapness as is very dangerous, and inconsistent with the Interest of the Nation. What the Merchant loses, is a Loss to the Nation, one Man's Ruine commonly drawing on many others. Gold, they say, may be bought too dear; and I am sure Cheapness bought with the Ruine of its Authors, is the worst way of buying it: But on the contrary, Plenty with a moderate Profit is what will ever be the Honour and Safety of a Kingdom.

FINIS.

